DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 351 523 CE 062 335

AUTHOR Schmidt, B. June; Beeken, Lois A.
TITLE Helping Vocational and Academic Teachers Collaborate To Improve Students' Reading and Writing Skills: An Over-Time Inservice Activity.
INSTITUTION National Center for Research in Vocational Education, Berkeley, CA.
SPONS AGENCY Office of Vocational and Adult Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE Oct 92
CONTRACT V051A80004-91A
NOTE 11p.; A Technical Assistance Report. For a related document, see CE 062 340.
AVAILABLE FROM NCRVE Materials Distribution Service, Horrabin Hall 46, Western Illinois University, Macomb, IL 61455 (order no. MDS-299: $2).
PUB TYPE Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Content Area Reading; Educational Cooperation; English Teacher Education; *Inservice Teacher Education; Institutes (Training Programs); Language Arts; Postsecondary Education; Program Development; Program Evaluation; Program Implementation; *Reading Skills; Secondary Education; *Student Improvement; *Teaching Methods; Technical Writing; *Vocational Education Teachers; *Writing Skills

ABSTRACT

Staff development was provided for academic and vocational teachers interested in improving their students' reading and writing skills. The first step was to examine the need. Survey data collected from students and vocational program completers from Southern Regional Education Board-Vocational Education Consortium pilot site schools revealed a need for more attention to reading and writing skills. A Reading/Writing Institute was undertaken to address these concerns. The second step involved working with a task force to develop long-range plans. A general framework for the inservice activities was planned. During the third step, teams (identified by pilot-site coordinators) composed of a language arts teacher and a vocational teacher who were committed to improving the reading and writing competencies of students in vocational programs would implement strategies learned at the institute, and would provide leadership and instruction to other teachers. The fourth and fifth steps included conducting face-to-face inservice sessions and preparing and distributing newsletters. During the 2-day institute, 125 participants learned to use a number of different reading and writing strategies. They met with others from their states and pilot sites to formulate plans of action for the coming school year. The evaluation step consisted of a survey of use of the strategies. A problem with offering over-time staff development was high turnover of participants in a conference setting. (YLB)

ED351523

National Center for Research in
Vocational Education

University of California, Berkeley

HELPING VOCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC TEACHERS COLLABORATE TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' READING AND WRITING SKILLS: AN OVER-TIME INSERVICE ACTIVITY

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

B. June Schmidt
Lois A. Beeken

Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

National Center for Research in Vocational Education
University of California at Berkeley
1995 University Avenue, Suite 375
Berkeley, CA 94704

Supported by
The Office of Vocational and Adult Education,
U.S. Department of Education

October, 1992 MDS-299

CE062335

This document is one in a continuing series of Technical Assistance Reports. It has not been reviewed by NCRVE; therefore, this paper represents the views of its authors and not necessarily those of the Center or the U.S. Department of Education. NCRVE makes these Technical Assistance Reports available upon request for informational purposes.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

FUNDING INFORMATION

Project Title:	National Center for Research in Vocational Education
Grant Number:	V051A80004-91A
Act under which Funds Administered:	Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act P. L. 98-524
Source of Grant:	Office of Vocational and Adult Education U.S. Department of Education Washington, DC 20202
Grantee:	The Regents of the University of California National Center for Research in Vocational Education 1995 University Avenue, Suite 375 Berkeley, CA 94704
Director:	Charles S. Benson
Percent of Total Grant Financed by Federal Money:	100%
Dollar Amount of Federal Funds for Grant:	$5,918,000

Disclaimer:

This publication was prepared pursuant to a grant with the Office of Vocational and Adult Education, U.S. Department of Education. Grantees undertaking such projects under government sponsorship are encouraged to express freely their judgement in professional and technical matters. Points of view of opinions do not, therefore, necessarily represent official U.S. Department of Education position or policy.

Discrimination:

Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 states: "No person in the United States shall, on the ground of race, color, or national origin, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 states: "No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving federal financial assistance." Therefore, the National Center for Research in Vocational Education project, like every program or activity receiving financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Education, must be operated in compliance with these laws.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HELPING VOCATIONAL AND ACADEMIC TEACHERS COLLABORATE TO IMPROVE STUDENTS' READING AND WRITING SKILLS: AN OVER-TIME INSERVICE ACTIVITY

This report details procedures used to provide a Reading/Writing Institute for vocational and nonvocational teacher teams from the Southern Regional Education Board-Vocational Education Consortium pilot sites. Objectives of the Institute included helping teachers to gain an understanding of the framework within which technical reading and writing may be used, to understand the use of technical reading and writing strategies, and to be able to apply the strategies in specific settings. The Institute evolved through six steps: (1) examining the need, (2) long-range planning,(3) identifying participants, (4) conducting the face-to-face sessions, (5) preparing and distributing a newsletter, and (6) evaluating the activity. Each step is addressed separately. Strengths and problems associated with conducting the Institute along with suggestions for others planning inservice activities of this type are also provided.

INTRODUCTION

The National Center for Research in Vocational Education (NCRVE) Inservice Education Project staff followed a series of steps to provide staff development for academic and vocational teachers interested in improving their students' reading and writing skills. From planning and implementation, this staff development effort spanned a time period of two years. The first steps taken were to examine the need and to establish goals for the effort. In addition, a general framework for the inservice activities were planned. Procedures for identifying participants and a physical setting for the activities followed. The implementation steps included conducting face-to-face inservice sessions and preparing and distributing newsletters. Evaluation activities were incorporated as feasible throughout the implementation steps. The procedures followed can be used by others, particularly staff development personnel at state and local levels, as a model for planning inservice efforts similar to the Reading/Writing Institute described. The final section of the report addresses procedures that were effective and those that created problems.

Step 1: Examining the Need

When formed in 1988, the Southern Regional Education Board-Vocational Education Consortium adopted the overall goal of achieving significant gains in the mathematics, science, and communications competencies of high school graduates from the general and vocational curriculums. To achieve this goal, both vocational and academic teachers at the Consortium pilot-site schools needed new strategies for teaching math, science, and communication competencies. One area, in particular, where the teachers needed help was in developing students' reading and writing communication skills. Survey data collected by the Consortium two years later, in 1990, from students completing vocational programs at the pilot sites confirmed the need. Students rated less than 50% of their vocational teachers as stressing reading and writing skills. Further, roughly 30% of them reported the need for more help with reading technical materials and writing technical information. In addition, follow-up data collected from the 1988 vocational program completers at the pilot sites one year after graduation revealed that a similar proportion of them reported a need for more attention to these same skills. These findings substantiate concerns expressed by employers that educators hear over and over again. Thus, the Reading/Writing Institute was undertaken to address these concerns.

Step 2: Long-Range Planning

The second step in organizing the inservice activity involved working with a task force to develop long-range plans. The task force included two professors of reading from two separate higher education institutions, a reading supervisor from a state department of education, a researcher who had examined the teaching of technical reading skills in high school settings, the Consortium Director, and two members of the Inservice Education Project staff. In December 1989, the group met for a full day to discuss and map-out strategies for what became known as the Reading/Writing Institute. An important aspect of the Institute that was addressed as part of the planning was how to select individuals to participate who would serve as the nucleus of a team effort where "teachers teach teachers." The task force enumerated the following criteria as appropriate for selecting team members:

- Willingness to examine own teaching
- Openness to new ideas
- Willingness to change
- Ability to work with others
- Willingness to devote time to others
- Leadership ability

Broad objectives for the Institute participants included:

- Understanding the framework within which technical reading and writing instructional strategies may be used,
- Understanding a variety of technical reading and writing instructional strategies,
- Understanding the contexts within which the strategies may be used, and
- Selecting and applying meaningful strategies in specific settings.

Further, responsibilities of various organizations that would be involved in conducting the Reading/Writing institute were identified. Key responsibilities of

the NCRVE Inservice Education Project staff were to

- develop the overall instructional plan for the Institute,
- organize instructional materials, and
- prepare a management plan for delivery of the staff development instruction.

Responsibilities of the Consortium were to

- distribute information to the states,
- encourage participation from the states, and
- help with logistics of the instructional setting.

States with the pilot-site schools were to

- select teams that had both vocational and academic teachers,
- provide funds needed for team members to participate in the Consortium staff development conferences for two summers, and
- provide forums for team members to share what they were learning with others.

Establishing the needed time frame for the proposed activities of the Institute proved especially troublesome. The planning task force felt that the desired time for the activities would be a total of 45 hours, a number that was not realistic at the implementation stage. At each of the 1990 and 1991 Consortium staff development conferences, two days of roughly 6 hours each were used for a total of 24 hours.

Step 3: Identifying Participants

In January 1990 the Consortium director wrote pilot-site coordinators asking them to identify teams of academic and vocational teachers to participate in the Institute. They were to select teams comprised of a language arts and a vocational teacher who were committed to improving the reading and writing competencies of students in vocational programs. Further, they were to be teachers who would not

only implement strategies learned at the Institute in their own classes but would also provide leadership and instruction to help other vocational and nonvocational teachers to do the same. The site directors were also asked to encourage counselors, principals, vocational administrators, school board members, business and industry representatives, and teacher educators to participate in the staff development effort along with the teacher teams.

In April, the site directors were sent details about the Institute from the Inservice Education Project staff. They received information about the reading-in-the-content area specialist selected to conduct the Institute sessions, and the reading-in-the-content area text that served as the basis for the Institute instruction. They were asked to send selected participants to the Institute prepared to discuss reading and writing problems they were encountering with their students. In addition, they were asked to have participants review the text prior to the Institute sessions scheduled for the 1990 Consortium staff development conference.

Step 4: Conducting the Face-to-Face Sessions

Approximately 700 individuals attended the 1990 Consortium staff development conference with 125 of them participating in the two-day Reading/Writing Institute. During the two days of the Institute, the teams learned to use a number of different reading and writing strategies. Further, they formulated plans for putting the strategies to use in their own classes and in the classes of colleagues from their pilot sites. The reading-in-the-content area specialist who conducted the sessions had developed a variety of reading and writing strategies through working with both vocational and academic teachers in their own classrooms. Thus, the sessions focused on strategies relevant to the participants.

Specific topics for the Institute sessions included "Why Reading in the Content Area?," "Advancing Students' Technical Vocabulary," "Strategies for Teaching Writing for Learning," and "Strategies for Teaching Study Skills in Reading and Writing." As the sessions progressed, the participants had hands-on experience using the strategies. Through small discussion groups, they shared their own experiences with teaching reading and writing and they practiced with one another the strategies they were learning.

As part of the Institute, participants met with others from their states and their pilot sites to formulate plans of action for the coming school year. Some

planned to have language arts and vocational teachers meet on a regular basis to stimulate interaction, to review one another's curriculum, and to visit in one another's classes. Further, participants planned to share experiences they were having when they tried the reading and writing strategies with their students. They also planned to develop reading and writing projects that spanned across vocational and academic classes.

A common theme of participants' plans was to gain administrative support for staff development time of other faculty and to continue improving the team's own skills for teaching reading and writing. Some even planned to involve individuals from the business community to support the need for teaching job-related reading and writing skills.

The 1991 Institute sessions were patterned after the 1990 sessions, with particular attention given to needs identified by the participants through their responses to a survey. Teams of academic and vocational teachers from the pilot sites again participated, with the total number being 130. The second day of the 1991 Institute focused on the problem of getting students to read technical materials in their vocational classes, a need the Institute participants voiced at the 1990 sessions and through the survey.

Step 5: Preparing and Distributing Newsletters

Two newsletters were mailed to participants between the 1990 and 1991 Institute sessions. The newsletters featured additional reading and writing strategies for the teachers to try in their classes. Again, these were strategies that the reading-in-the-content area specialist had developed with teachers in actual classroom settings. The newsletters also informed the participants of plans for the 1991 Institute sessions. The first newsletter was mailed in early December; the second in April.

The second newsletter included a survey requesting feedback from the participants as to which of the strategies they had used and which they had found to be helpful. In response they identified four strategies they used most often and most successfully; they also identified strategies with which they needed more help, and strategies they had used and had not found helpful. These responses, as noted, served to determine the focus and content of the 1991 Institute sessions.

Step 6: Evaluating the Activity

Besides the survey of use of the strategies noted above, the survey respondents were also asked to provide comments about their use of the strategies. Comments included, "I use as many of the strategies as I can because I really like the difference they make in my class," "I have found almost every strategy I have tried helpful (and) I have tried to teach other teachers in my school some of the strategies," and "I wish I had more planning time as the strategies work when used." Thus, this method of obtaining feedback proved very useful and the teachers using the reading and writing strategies were positive about them.

Evaluation of the Institute sessions that were provided through the Consortium staff development conferences was included as part of the overall conference evaluation process. For both years, the sessions proved to be one of the strengths of the conferences.

ASSESSING STRENGTHS AND PROBLEMS OF THE INSTITUTE

Among the Institute strengths was the favorable reception participants gave it at both Consortium summer staff development conferences. During the planning stages, participation was anticipated to be 70 to 80 individuals. The actual number of participants exceeded the estimate by two thirds which created some logistical problems in the conduct of Institute sessions. The sessions were, however, positively received indicating that the need definitely existed for inservice activities focusing on improving students' reading and writing skills.

Unfortunately, time constraints for the Institute sessions limited the extent to which the reading and writing strategies could be covered. Thus, participants did not have the opportunity to fully understand how to use most effectively some of the strategies. Further, all of the 1990 participants were not included in the 1991 participant group due to site funding procedures. New attendees in 1991 were, however, familiar with some of the reading and writing strategies and fully participated in the 1991 sessions.

The concept of offering over-time staff development activities is a sound one. However, attempting to do so in a setting with high turnover of participants, such as the Consortium staff development conferences, was not the most desirable approach. The steps followed were logical and appropriate and can serve as a guide to others planning staff development activities.

Suggestions for other planning Institutes of this type include:

- Assemble a planning team that is knowledgeable about the target group for the inservice activity, staff development, and the content focus.
- As part of the planning stage, spell out responsibilities of all individuals and organizations concerned.
- Secure a leader for the inservice activity who is not only knowledgeable about the topic but also flexible and works effectively with teachers with diverse backgrounds.
- Select participants who need and are able to benefit from the inservice activities.
- Arrange for physical facilities that are comfortable and able to accommodate adequately those attending.
- Provide follow-up for the inservice activity, such as the newsletters distributed as part of the Reading/Writing Institute.
- Plan evaluation procedures from the outset.